

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS HARARE 002045

SIPDIS

NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR J. FRAZER  
LONDON FOR C. GURNEY  
PARIS FOR C. NEARY  
NAIROBI FOR T. PFLAUMER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: ZCTU DETAINEES RELEASED

REF: A. HARARE 2035

[B](#). 2002 HARARE 2784

[1](#)1. Labor contacts report that most of the detained Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) supporters (ref A) were released without spending the night in jail. In Harare, out of forty-one detainees, twenty signed admissions of guilt and paid a \$5,000 (US\$88) fine. The remainder of the Harare contingent, including senior leaders President Lovemore Matombo and Secretary General Wellington Chibebe, refused to sign an admission of guilt, and were told to report to the courthouse this morning. The courts are currently hearing their cases, and ZCTU expects charges to be brought under the Public Order and Security Act (POSA). Initial reports from other areas also indicate that few (if any) labor unionists were kept in jail overnight.

[1](#)2. The contacts also report that this was never intended to be a stayaway or mass action, but simply a labor-led protest at the deteriorating conditions facing most Zimbabweans. The ZCTU planned to march to the Ministry of Finance to express frustration with the constant shortages and increasing burdens (including the income-tax creep which is placing many of the lowest-paid Zimbabweans in 20 to 35 percent tax brackets). Due to the demise of the independent newspaper The Daily News, the protest had little advance public warning, although labor groups had printed their own broadsides listing their grievances.

[1](#)3. Comment. The ZCTU believes that the instantaneous response from international labor supporters was key in gaining quick release for this group. When Chibebe was arrested last December (also under POSA charges which were never supported), he was kept incommunicado for days, moved from one filthy cell to another, and beaten by his captors (ref B). The public uproar over those actions seemed to take the GOZ by surprise, and may have changed the rules of engagement. This time, he was released within hours. The ZCTU has long been adamant that some public challenge to the status quo must be issued. While placing its leaders on the front lines and setting them up for arrest was not the expected strategy, it has certainly garnered a lot of attention -- despite the lack of an independent daily newspaper. End comment.

WHITEHEAD